

CAMBODIAN TRADITIONAL CRAFTS AND RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES

by

George Chigas

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I thank the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association of
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to complete this project,

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INTRODUCTION

The Cambodian traditional arts and religious ceremonies created and documented for this project ~~are~~ the product of a year of field work and research that involved the participation of over of over thirty Cambodian craftsmen, musicians, dancers, Buddhist monks and laymen, as well as the support and encouragement of many other members of the Cambodian Communities of Greater Lowell, Boston, and Providence, Rhode Island.

The Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association of Greater Lowell, Inc. became involved with other organizations to coordinate the Cambodian artists and performers, particularly The Refugee Arts Group of Country Roads, Inc. which contributed the services of their videographer, Ann Bartholomew, whose outstanding work and generous spirit enabled us to record the dancers and kitemakers on video tape.

Much time was also spent at the Trairatanaram Buddhist Temple in North Chelmsford documenting the religious ceremonies performed there which included the Consecration of the Buddha Statue, a rare and special event in Buddhist practice. The help of the Venerable Sao Khon and Mr. Heng Bun Chea played a vital part in the recording and understanding of these ceremonies. Their efforts are very appreciated by all.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most valuable benefit of this project is the satisfaction and heightened sense of self-worth felt by the artists and performers who saw that their abilities and talents are of value and interest to many individuals in the United States.

The success of this project depends on the continuing support of Cambodian tradition arts by community organizations. This support is critically needed by the artists and performers who are uncertain if their talents are of use or interest in the United States.

KITE MAKING

KITE MAKING

According to a popular legend, the Cambodian folk hero Thnon Chhay invented the Klaing Aik (singing kite) to trick the Chinese king who had imprisoned him on a cold island after Thnon Chhay had publically humiliated the king. By using the long hair of his fellow prisoners for string Thnon Chhey was able to fly his Klaing Aik over the king's palace after the king had gone to sleep. Night after night the kite's "voice" confused and annoyed the king until he finally summoned the palace sorcerer to determine the source of the strange singing voice.

The sorcerer reported that the singing was an evil omen that foretold of the end of China. The disturbed king demanded to know more. The sorcerer continued by telling the king that the omen spoke of an unknown animal that would descend upon China and devour all his subjects. The frantic king asked the sorcerer if there was anything he could do to prevent the omen from coming true. The sorcerer said that the only way he could prevent the catastrophe was by releasing the Cambodian prisoner from the cold island. Immediately, the king ordered that Thnon Chhey be freed and sent back to Cambodia under the guard of one hundred Chinese men and women, which is the reason why there are so many Chinese people living in Cambodia today.

The "singing kite" of Thnon Chhay is still made today during festivals in Cambodia, and, since the completion of this project, in Lowell, Massachusetts, as well.

The pictures that you will see show Mr. Soeur Tim and his father, Mr. Tim Sao, making a version of the Klaing Aik at their home in Lowell, Massachusetts.

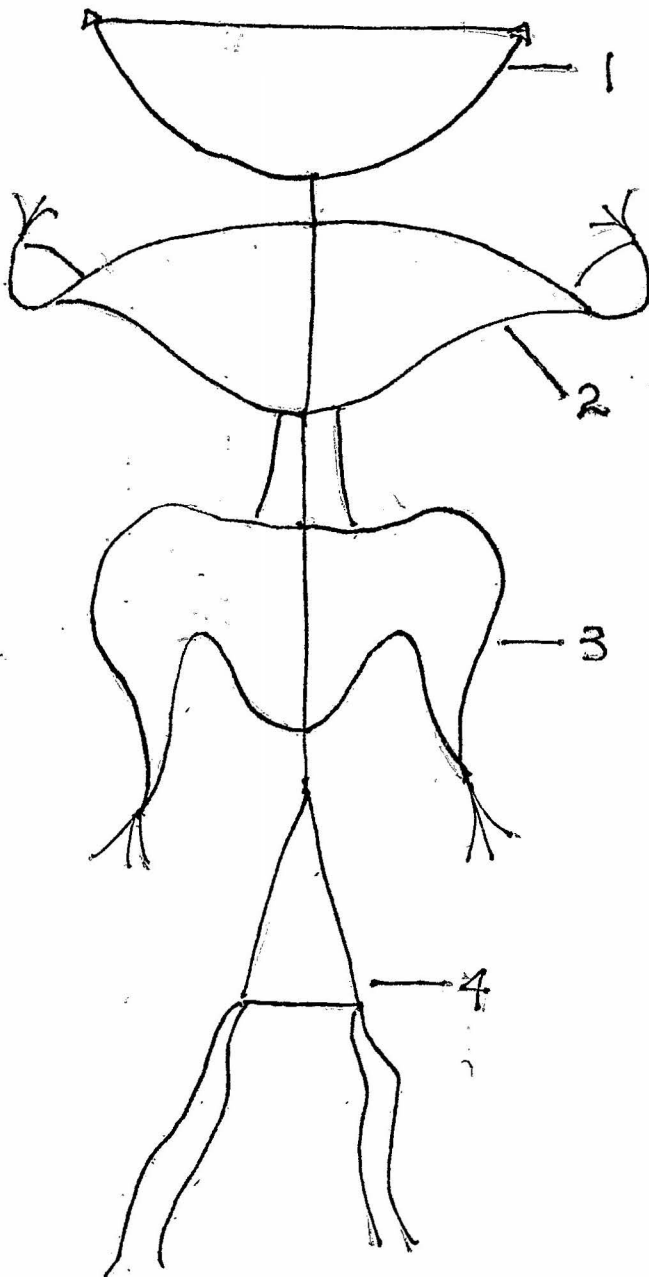
The materials they used to make the kite were: bamboo, imported from Thailand; copper wire; nylon fabric; and good ole Elmers Glue.

Before we look at the pictures that follow let's discuss the unique design of the Klaing Aik to see what makes it different from other kites you may have seen before.

The distinguishing feature of the Klaing Aik is the device at the head of the kite that enables it to "sing". This device is called the "Aik" and is made of a very thin ribbon of bamboo that is pulled taut by the bowed ends of another length of bamboo, much like the string of a hunting bow. The singing sound is produced when the thin bamboo ribbon vibrates in the wind during flight. The tension of the Aik can be adjusted to "tune" the sound, however this is a very difficult task to do properly.

The particular design of the Klaing Aik varies according to the individual craftsman, who, it should be noted, has no written instructions to work from, instead, he relies on memory to determine the various proportions of the kite.

Generally, the Klaing Aik has four sections:



1. The Aik, which produces the singing.
2. The Top Wing, which propels the kite into the air.
3. The Bottom Wing that stabilizes the kite during flight.
4. The Tail Piece which balances the kite so it "stands up" better in the wind.

The pictures that follow were taken at the home of Mr. Soeun Tim located only two blocks from the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association of Greater Lowell, Inc. where he attends classes in English as a Second Language. Soeun came to the United States on September, 12, 1985, after escaping the oppressive government of his native country, Cambodia.

Soeun learned how to make the Klaing Aik from his father who also makes baskets, musical instruments, and other crafts, and was a rice farmer in the Battambang Province, a fertile area in the northwest section of the country where much of the rice is grown in Cambodia.

Soeun is married and has seven children ranging from three months to twenty-one years of age and shares his four room apartment with his father and mother.

Now let's take a look at the pictures and try to follow the progress of Mr. Soeun Tim and his father as they went about the making of the legendary Klaing Aik. (The numbers that begin each paragraph correspond to the numbers assigned to the accompanying photograph.)

1. Soeun shaves down a bamboo splint with a knife by pulling it across the knife blade while using his finger as a guide; similar to the action of a plane. This splint and another will be used to make the Top Wing. Earlier they were split from the pole with a large kitchen knife pounded with a hammer. The hacksaw to his right was used to cut the splint to the correct length.

2. Tim , working independently, begins to cut the "M"-shaped Tail Piece that he will attach to the bottom of the spine and will be used to anchor the long cloth tail.

3. The two splits were attached to the spine with copper wire then tied again at the ends in such a way that the bottom split could be curved up and held in place with a wire tied to the Top Wing.

4. Tim uses his forearm to measure the length of the spine. He will mark how long the spine should be with a pencil then cut it with the hacksaw to the correct length in proportion with the Top Wing. The design of the Top Wing, by the way, is a different shape from the one that Soeun made previously which had rounded ends; he considers this shape more beautiful. Once the spine is cut to length Tim will shave the end with a file to fit the Tail Piece that he has notched with a chisel, and finally secure the spine to the notched Tail Piece with two small tacks carefully driven in with a hammer.

5. Soeun and Tim join the slats of the Bottom Wing with copper wire. As with the Top Wing, the bamboo slats for the Bottom Wing were planed down with a knife to make them flexible so they could be bent into shape. (In order to achieve the delicate curves of the design the slats are gradually bent by hand to actually reform the bamboo.) The two splits are fit into notches carved into the spine and secured with copper wire. The top slat of the Bottom Wing is then attached to the bottom slat of the Top Wing with copper wire six inches from the spine. This is done to initiate the characteristic curve of the Bottom Wing that will be held in place when the two slats are finally joined as shown in the picture.

6. Soeun makes final modifications to the Bottom Wing.

7. Tim secures the notched Tail Piece to the bottom of the spine with hammer and small tacks.

8. Earlier, Tim had bored holes into the Tail Piece with a handmade tool made of a pointed steel shaft fit into a round wooden handle which he spun between his hands to drill the holes into the Tail Piece. In this picture you can see that two thin bamboo dowels have been inserted into these holes and secured at the other end by shaving them so thin that Tim was able to loop them over the Bottom Wing then bind them with wire. Except for the Aik the basic structure of the frame is now complete.

9. To affix the nylon covering to the frame, the covering is first spread on the floor. The frame is then placed on top of the covering which is marked for reference to keep it in place while it is being cut. The covering is cut and glued section by section not pre-cut then glued in a single piece as one might expect. Soeun told us that in Cambodia if glue was not available he would make homemade glue by mixing rice flour with boiling water.

10. The covering is nearly complete. Excess fabric is used to make streamers to decorate the wing tips. Tim also cut paper flowers to use as eyes on the Top Wing but decided not to include them in the end.

11. Tim fits the Aik onto the top of the spine. The piece is made of two bamboo slats, the first is longer and will act as the bow that will pull the thin bamboo "singing" ribbon taut; the second piece is used to add support to the longer piece to which it is bound lengthwise with wire, and also provide a means for attaching the Aik to the top of the spine. This is done by separating the two tightly bound pieces and fitting the spine between them and fastening them with wire. The ends of the longer piece are notched like a hunting bow to fasten the string that will pull the vibrating ribbon taut.

12. Soeun readies the vibrating bamboo ribbon for stringing to the bow. Like the other bamboo splits used to make the wings, the vibrating ribbon was shaved down with a knife. However, to make the strip flexible enough to vibrate it had to be honed down much more than the other pieces until it was nearly as thin as a sheet of paper. This can be difficult and painful for the craftsman since the friction generated by repeatedly pulling the bamboo ribbon between the knife and his finger can burn his skin. The thin ribbon is also notched at the ends and looped and hooked with the cord that will be strung to the bow piece which has similar notches. As was previously explained, the string can be restrung on the bow to adjust the tension.

13. Soeun makes some adjustments to the Bottom Wing.

14. Soeun holds up the kite for everyone to admire.

15. Tim cuts the strips of material that will be used to make the long tail that will serve to balance the kite as it ascends into the air.

16. The strips are glued together end to end then attached to the Tail Piece with wire.

Finally the spine is rigged with a guide loop of string where the tether will be fastened, and the Klaing Aik is ready to fly!

17. To fly the Klaing Aik we went to a nearby park located on the crest of a hill that overlooks the city of Lowell. The infamous day of the flight was August, 24, 1987. It was a beautiful, cool, fall-like day with big puffy clouds scudding across the sky; a perfect day to watch and take pictures of the Klaing Aik in action. However, when Soeun and his father tried to launch the kite it climbed only ten feet into the air before veering to one side and crashing to the ground. On their second attempt, despite the strong gusts of wind that bent the tree tops, they were unable to launch the kite again. The wind was not steady enough, it came on strong then quickly died before the kite was aloft.

18. Tim adjusted the Aik and fastened it farther down the spine to better balance the kite. They tried again and were more successful but again the kite veered to one side and crashed on it's nose. They then tried tying branches to the tail to give it more weight so it would stand up better during take off and catch more wind. This helped but the wind died just as the Klaing Aik was in mid take off. Finally, they decided to give it one last try and....

19. it flew!

BASKET MAKING

When I asked a friend in the Lowell Cambodian Community about who to talk to about basket making he suggested that I speak to Mr. Em Yung. I knew Em was a student at the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association of Greater Lowell, Inc. but I had no idea then what a skilled craftsman he is, particularly as a basket maker. It made me wonder about all the talent and ability that the students possess that is never made use of in this country. Perhaps this is due to the fact that many of the refugees who were farmers in Cambodia feel that their skills are no longer of value in a modern industrial city. I have observed many refugees who formerly led productive, self-sufficient lives suffering from a depression that apparently results from their loss of pride and feelings of self worth. One of the rewards of conducting this crafts project was observing the tremendous satisfaction that the craftspeople displayed when they realized that their talents are considered interesting and valuable to people in this country.

In evidence of the loss of self esteem felt by many of the refugees, I was initially looked upon with skepticism and wonder when I confronted Mr. Em Yung with a contract to create traditional baskets for our project. He was obviously surprised that any one could possibly want to pay him for doing something which he considered commonplace and obsolete. When I assured him that it was in fact true he

hedged again saying that it would be impossible to find the necessary materials. Although I feared the same I assured him that the materials were available. In the end he consented and we were under way.

Em's doubts about finding the proper materials turned out to be justified, and the difficulty of locating a source of bamboo appropriate for basket making had me wondering if I did not give Em false hopes.

A few months earlier I learned of a man in Lexington, Massachusetts who was a member of the American Bamboo Society (yes, there is in fact such an organization) who actually grew bamboo in his back yard. Shortly afterward, my wife and I went to his house with some Cambodian friends to see if the bamboo would be of any use to us. It turned out that he had a rather thick stand of bamboo poles that he needed thinned; he even provided us with saws. Two hours later we drove home with twenty, ten foot bamboo poles sticking out of the trunk of our car. We eventually used them to make small kites in the classroom at the Cambodian M.A.A. and were left with a few extra poles. When I brought them to Em Yung's house for him to inspect it turned out that they were too narrow and dry to be of use. Also, since the growing season is much shorter here, the distance between the nodes was much too short and would make it impossible to adequately bend the bamboo with out causing it to crack and split.

My next try was with import stores that I found in the New York yellow pages in the reference section at the Pollard Memorial Library. After a few attempts I made contact with Bamboo and Rattan Works of Newark, New Jersey. They were kind enough to send me a catalogue of their wares and promptly fill my subsequent orders. Apparently Bon Marche had bought out all the thicker poles to decorate their showrooms for the season's new summer line and the thickest poles they had in stock were only 3 inches in diameter. But they also had other types of bamboo as well such as flat sections split from very wide poles and strips used to weave seats and yes, according to the salesperson, baskets! I immediately ordered a sample of both and two days later presented them to Mr. Em Yung. To my surprise he was not at all happy with my discovery but said he would give it a try. He kept reminding me how good the bamboo was in Cambodia and Thailand and how good the baskets were that he made there. I left his house that day a little disheartened but all the more determined to come up with the right stuff. The next day I made another order with Bamboo and Rattan asking them to send me the widest poles they had in stock. It also crossed my mind to pay Bon Marche a visit but I didn't want to sabotage their sales display until all other alternatives were exhausted. The poles arrived and when Em saw them he said they still weren't like the bamboo he had used in Cambodia and Thailand but they would do; the next time I saw him the first basket had already been completed.

Before we look at the pictures of Mr. Em Yung that show some of the steps involved in making a traditional basket I would like to describe a few of the different kinds of baskets and the purposes for which they are used.

1. The Baunkae.

This type of basket is typically used in the garden. It has three handles and is loosely woven. It can be used for carry dirt, vegetables, etc.

2. The Kon Chharaing.

This basket is woven using a diamond pattern that leave holes in the weave. This design is used for sifting the dirt from the rice after harvest.

3. The Kon Law.

A weaving style called "over three under three" is used with this basket that is sometimes coated with "madrak" (similar to tree sap) to waterproof the basket. It can be used to carry water.

4. The Kon Tang.

This type is a small finely woven basket used for carrying food or as an eating bowl.

5. The Ong Rake.

This term is used to describe the pole and baskets together, which are balanced on the user's shoulder.

6. The Song Rake.

This refers to only the basket and holder of the Ong Rake that can be used separately, held over the shoulder to climb a fruit tree, or hoisted with a rope over a limb to fill with fruit then lowered to the ground and emptied.

BASKET MAKING

1. Mr. Em Yung measures the bamboo pole after calculating how long to make the splits that will be used to make the basket.

2. Em cuts the pole with a hacksaw blade.

3. The cut section of the pole is then split down the center with a large knife...

4. then pulled open.

5. Each split is divided again and again until they are thin enough to be shaved down.

6. Em works his knife down the length of the split. Extra strength and care are required to split the nodes without damaging the bamboo or your hand.

7. One more time.

8. The good splits are separated from the others and tied in a bundle.

9. Em begins the long process of individually shaving each splint until it is thin enough to weave. He wraps a piece of material around his finger to insulate his skin against the heat generated each time the splint is pulled over the knife.

10. Not thin enough yet.

11. Many of the tools Em used while making the baskets are either homemade or brought over from Thailand or Cambodia. It was necessary for Em to keep his knife very sharp during the shaving process with the whetting stone.

12. The next series of photographs were taken as Em was finishing the Kon Tang, a basket that we briefly described earlier. This basket is very tightly woven using the "three over, three under" formula, and can be used as a bowl or food carrier. Em said that his wife would carry the noon meal to him out in the field with this type of basket. In this series of photographs Em is fastening a ring of bamboo to the rim of the basket. The ring will strengthen and help shape the basket. In this particular photograph Em is securing the bamboo ring with a pliers that he has modified into a temporary vice grip with a loop of string. The tool holds the ring in place as Em secures it to the rim of the basket with copper wire.

13. Em threads the copper wire through the bamboo weave.


14. Here we can see the style of weaving more clearly. As you can see, a different technique other than the "three over, three under" is used to make the sides of the basket. This technique is the tboeung, or diamond shape, which is very compatible with the "three over, three under" style.

15. Em nearly completes the bamboo ring.


16. Em uses a special handmade tool to force a space through the weave for the copper wire. The wire is looped at intervals around the ring and through the weave. The simple tool consists of a wooden dowel and a length of heavy gauge steel wire set in the wood.

17. Once the bamboo ring is complete Em shapes the basket with his hands to make a perfect circle. The bamboo is pliable and can be somewhat molded and shaped.

18. The high standards of the craftsman are hard to satisfy. Em was continually making adjustments with his baskets after he had completed them.




19. Using a hacksaw Em cuts notches in the end of the pole used with the Ong Rake (described earlier). The Ong Rake actually consists of three separate parts: the Dong Rake, the pole that is balanced on the shoulder; the Song Rake, the holder that hangs from the Ong Rake and carries the basket; and the Kon Chharaing, the baskets themselves.



20. Em shown sitting on his back steps displaying the large and small Baunkae. He said that the smaller sizes are typically used by the children who are expected to help in the garden.

21. Em displaying his Ong Rake. At the time of this photograph the second Song Rake had not been made so Em substituted one of the Baunkae.



WOODWORKING

WOODWORKING

The woodworking shown here was done by a man named Poolsin Pat. I first met Poolsin when he was a monk at the Trairatanaram Temple. At this time he and the other monks of the temple were studying English. I would go to the temple during the week after work to teach them in the basement of the temple where there were desks and a large chalkboard on which I wrote the dialogues that they wrote in their notebooks and repeated afterwards. Poolsin was an exceptional student and in time he was writing and reading with confidence. I soon learned that he was a talented sculptor as well and was working on the Buddha statue shown in a subsequent section. In a matter of weeks the statue was nearly complete.

He graciously offered to make a carving for this project and the next day we were off in search of the wood. Poolsin has his own tools and was a quick worker. I asked that he copy one of the base reliefs I found in a book by Heinrich Zimmer entitled "The Art of Indian Asia". He selected a relief from one of the temples constructed during the Angkor period which depicts a battle scene. In this excerpt warriors are returning from combat in a war against the Chams, a people who occupied what is now parts of South Vietnam and Southeast Cambodia.

NEEDLEWORK

NEEDLEWORK

The needlework shown on the following page was made by Mrs. Sarou Sieng who lives on Kimball Road in Lowell, Massachusetts.

When I first approached Mrs. Sarou Sieng to create an example of her work for the crafts project she was very willing to help in any way she could. Originally, she intended to make a large scale representation of the famous Angkor Wat, the celebrated Buddhist temple which is located in the old capital city of Angkor. The Angkor civilization, which dominated much of Southeast Asia between the eighth and fourteenth centuries, was responsible for creating the fantastic temples that are still considered today to be among the greatest artistic and architectural achievements of the world.

To begin the project we asked a local artist to draw the Angkor Wat on a large 3'X 5' rectangle of white cloth. We then went with Sarou to George's Textile to buy the thread. Sarou started to work the next day but shortly afterwards fell ill. She eventually had an operation and was still recovering when these pictures were taken. Naturally she had to stop working on the Angkor Wat project but was generous enough to offer a piece of work that she had done previously.

This particular piece is called a Srom Kinæe and is used as a pillow case. The design is her own and was drawn for her by her son-in-law who lives with her. Sarou said she learned how to do this kind of needlework as a girl in Cambodia from a Chinese woman who lived in the same village. The technique comes from China and the result is a thick plush carpet that is cut back with scissors to make a smooth surface.

Sarou is very active in the temple and devotes much of her time and talent to making similar pillow cases, floor mats, curtains, etc. for the monks and the temple. In the picture her head is shaven. This is sometimes done by members of the laity when they enter a period of religious devotion during which they observe stricter rules of conduct.

NEEDLEWORK

This example of needlework shows Mrs. Kam Phang working on the Komrope Trie.

The Komrope Trie is used during the ceremony of the ordination of a monk. During the ceremony the ordinand assembles outside the temple with the laity in order to walk in procession around the temple three times in recognition of the Three Refuges of Buddhism. The procession is led by the ordinand, close friends, and religious leaders. By his side stands a woman who balances a silver tray upon her head. Inside the tray are the robes that the candidate will wear once he is ordained. The Komrope Trie is placed as a covering over the robes.

FOLKLORE

FOI KLORE

The following is a transcription of an/ interview with Venerable Sao Khon about Cambodian Literature and folklore. The interview was conducted at the Trairatanaaram Temple in North Chelmsford with Mr. Heng Bun Chea acting as interpreter.

During the interview we discussed Venerable Sao Khon's interest in literature and some of the history of literature and folklore in Cambodia.

The interview ends with Venerable Sao Khon relating an episode from one of the most famous folktales from Cambodia, the Adventures of Thun Chhay.

INDEX AND PARAPHRASED TRANSCRIPTION BY R. DETH & E. MORRISH
INTERVIEW WITH VENERABLE SAO KHON BY GEORGE CHIGAS AND HENG
BUN CHEA FOR THE REFUGEE ARTS GROUP
JUNE 19 1987

NOTES &
COUNTER # PANASONIC SERVO MOTOR

O- Interview about Cambodian literature.

Sao Khon is 52 years old, and has been a monk for 32 years. Speaks Cambodian, Thai, Lao and a little English and French; also the religious languages of Pali and Sanskrit.

At 14 began to study to become a monk - became a nen

(). Went on to become a teacher which required 9 months training. Before 14 went to school

55 in his village. Part of the education in the temple was studying about Cambodia, not much about other countries. Focused on studying elementary education because he wanted to become a teacher. Read magazines for teachers. They explained how to teach children to be independent - such things as gardening (for food).

93 Cambodian literature he has read. The authors and writings include:

Ung Doung was king in Cambodia before colonisation by French and was a famous poet.

130 Reach Chin Rak Theavy () was a professor of philosophy and literature, during the time of Angkor Wat. She taught in the university. The university was free but only accepted special people the poor did not study philosophy and literature. All the people who studied in this school were from the elite - to become leaders.

166 Theavy did not write a book but her writings are inscribed in stone in the middle of the lake () at Angkor Thom. A small temple is built there, and crocodiles use it as a resting place.

200 Students can go there to study her writing. The writings talk of passion. They say love can destroy anything. Countries can become smaller and smaller because of love and the society become weak because of love. To become a leader do not take love and passion as the most important things in life.

240 Written in ancient Cambodian writing that looks like Sankrit, but not exactly the same.

273 There was a book, the History of Buddhism in Cambodia, written by many people - all Cambodians. It told of the history of Angkor etc. Sao Khon used to have this book but he lost it in Battambang.

315 The authors he mentioned earlier - some were from king's family and others farmers who became monks. Pickoc Som () wrote a famous story in the 1800's called Thum Thiw () about Cambodian customs.

Thum is the name of the boy, Thiow the name of the girl. The Venerable has a copy of the book that came from the Buddhist Institute, printed 1981. It was written in 1942.

260 The story took place at the old capital city of Long Veng (). Correction of above information book written in 1915.

383 The boys had to become Buddhist monks before they could marry. At 16 girls had to stay in the house for 3-6 months without seeing any boys, even their father, and without doing anything, except housework. That was the strong custom at that time, if it was not adhered to they would not be able to marry.

409 The author Du Ngoy () wrote about prison, and about morals - to be patient, friendly, helpful to others. he wrote a book "Chabab Psiang'Psaing"

(), means different rules. Teaches the young generation to live with friends, family, neighbors in good order. He tells stories through poems. He teaches especially about how to become able to do things mindfully and the reasons one becomes poor or a gambler.

499 Du Ngoy was a monk for 6 years and then became a lay person and philosopher. He was living in the French colony. His poems were sung to music of the Chapei () a long-necked lute and Say Deow () a one-stringed guitar.

552

His songs were done spontaneously, it was the French who wrote them down.

He lived in Khat Kondal, near Phnom Penh.

583

Nu Harch () is the author of Dried Flowers (), a love story of people from different castes. Victeavy, the girl and Bunthoeun, the boy, were playmates as children. The parents were good friends and tried to get the children engaged. Bunthoeun's parents were the boss-businessmen, Victeavy's mother was widowed from a rich family. They agreed to let the children be a couple in the future.

SIDE B

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Bunthoeun's father owned many boats that transported goods to Saigon, Vietnam, but all the boats were sunk and the family became poor. This made Victeavy's mother change her mind about the marriage. There was another rich businessman who wanted the girl as their daughter-in-law. Victeavy's mother accepted right away, but the girl did not like the new boy. The story took place in Battambang. Bunthoeun went to school in Phnom Penh and returned to Battambang for vacations. This is based on a true story and was written about 50 years ago.

27

Victeavy's mother tried to force her daughter to marry this new man who was from a Chinese family, she did not like it but she had to obey. Victeavy was a religious person, who chanted well and read a lot.

Finally she died to be faithful to Bunthoeun.

045

Another folk story is called Thnon Chhay () and is about the first man who made a kite. The author is unknown because he was trying to defeat the rich and the king. This story has been told through oral traditional not written down. Venerable first heard the story from an old man named Ta Lom () who was a reverend of the temple, around 1954. This was in Siem Reap province.

094

Venerable Sao Khon tells the story of Thnon Chhey as he remembers it.

When Thnon Chhey was a young boy he played at the millionaire's house. One day the wife asked him to do something for her and gave him a bamboo bowl of cooked rice (). This was a deep bowl full of rice, but Thnon Chhey said he did not want it because it was too small and he wanted a larger one. She poured the rice into a large shallow bamboo basket. When Thnon Chhey went home he found he had less rice, so since then he tried to destroy the rich people.

123

Thnon Chhey went to live with the millionaires to try and get his revenge. In those days the rich had meetings with the king. When the wife asked Thnon Chhey to go and tell her husband to come for lunch, he yelled it out all the way to the meeting. The husband was embarrassed and told Thnon Chhey next time he had something to tell him to whisper.

The next time he was asked to deliver a message was because the house was on fire. Thnon Chhey did not yell or say anything when he arrived at the meeting until the man asked him what he wanted, then he said quietly "your house is on fire". The man asked Thnon Chhey to go and remove some light things from the house and he would follow. He removed an empty bucket and a chicken nest. The millionaire returned from the meeting and asked what Thnon Chhey had removed, when he was told he became angry and asked who started the fire. Thnon Chhey said that he knew. He ran to the cooking stove saying "He started the fire".

This a shortened version of a very long story. That was Part I, about how Thnon Chhey outsmarts rich people.

Part II is about how Thnon Chhey outsmarts the king.

The king heard that Thnon Chhey was very smart - that he knows how to lie and give people orders, so he asked his servant to bring him to him. Noone can look at the king's face because he is so powerful. The King asks Thnon Chhey if he is able to order him to do something. Thnon Chhey says "No, unless you turn your face that way, then I can tell you to do something". The king turned his face and said "Why do you not tell me to do something?". To which Thnon Chheng replied "I did, I told you to turn your face over there." The was embarassed. The King then said "I heard you know how to lie to people, can you lie to me?" "No I

can't" said Thnon Chhey "because I don't have my book". The king ordered him to go home and return with the book. When Thnon Chhey returned the king asked "Where is your lying book?". "That's where I lied " said Thnon Chhey "I don't have any book."

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Part III is about the king trying to kill Thnon Chhey. The king had a large fighting-cock, a good rooster. He challenged Thnon Chhey to find a rooster to fight with his rooster and if he lost he would be killed. The king forbade people around the country to sell a rooster to Thnon Chhey. The day of the fight Thnong came with just a small chick that he had kept without food. Thnong had the chick in his pocket. When the king asked where his rooster was, Thnong took the chick out of his pocket and the chick ran. Thnong said "you see my chicken wants to fight." The rooster and the chick were put in the ring together. The chick was hungry and tried to get underneath the rooster thinking it was his mother. The rooster kept running away and the chick kept chasing him. Thnon Chhey laughed saying "I won, my rooster chased your rooster out of the ring." Once again Thnon Chhey had beaten the king again. The king had another plan. He did the same thing except with a buffallow (ox?). Thnon repeated his actions too, buying a baby buffallow and not giving it any milk for a couple of weeks. When the fight

came the baby buffallow went under the king's buffallow and tried to suck. This tickled the king's buffallow who ran away. Again Thnon Chhey won.

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The reason Thnon Chhey made the kite in the story.

Thnon Chhey was deported to China for embarrassing the king. Thnon began to make Cambodian noodle cakes

() to sell from village to village.

At that time in China noone knew how to make these noodles.

The king ordered Thnon to bring him some to the palace. The Chinese do not show their face to anyone but Thnon was curious and wanted to see the King of China's face.

The King was eating the noodles but with his head down - not in the right way. Thnon said to the king "if you want these noodles to be more delicious you must eat them with your chin up and your mouth open".

Like this Thnon was able to look into the king's face. He said "The face of China's King is like a dog, the face of the King of Cambodia is like a full moon".

The king called the soldiers and had Thnon put in prison on the coldest island in China. Thnon made other prisoners mad so they would fight, in that way, with boxing, he became sweaty and kept warm.

Thnon Chhey asked everyone if they wanted to be free.

He made a kite using the long hair of the prisoners for the kite's string and the piece that made the sound (). Every night when it

was quiet he flew the kite to the King's palace. The strange sound of the kite kept the king awake.

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Now, most Chinese people believe fortune tellers. The king asked a fortune teller what strange animal it was keeping him awake at night. The fortune teller told the King if he continued to keep the intelligent Cambodian in prison, that strange animal will eat all the people in China. Thnon Chhey was released but the king realised he could not keep him in China. He said "I have to send him back." A hundred Chinese men and a hundred Chinese women were sent with Thnon Chhey to guard him. This is why there are so many Chinese people in Cambodian today.

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The story of Ream Kei

This story came from an old man who meditated alone in the mountains. He told about what he found out by using the story of men fighting for women. It is a mixture of Hindu and Buddhism. In the Indian story of Ramayana, Ramayana had to fight very hard to get his wife back, with help from hunuman, the monkey.

ORDINATION OF NOVICE MONK

ORDINATION OF NOVICE MONK

On June 27th and 28th, 1987, John Massey was ordained into the Buddhist Order at the Trairatanaram Temple in North Chelmsford, Massachusetts.

This was the first time in history that an American was ordained as a Cambodian Novice Monk in the Greater Lowell area.

John is thirty-five years old and has been practicing Buddhism for over twenty years. He is of German descent and lived in Newburyport, Massachusetts before moving into the temple after his ordination.

The ordination ceremony is conducted over two days. During the first day the candidate celebrates his last day as a member of the laity and dressed as a prince bids friends and parents farewell, for the parents by allowing the candidate to enter the monastic order are "giving up" their son; this act of "giving up" is at the center of Buddhist practice.

On the second day the ordinand offers his robes to the monk whom he has chosen to be his spiritual guide who then returns them with instructions to change and officially join the monastic order as a novice monk.

ORDINATION OF NOVICE MONK

1. The ceremony follows the Renunciation of Prince Siddhatha Gotama who was the Buddha in his last incarnation. On the first day of the ceremony the candidate dresses as a prince. His head, eyebrows, and facial hair are shaved by a monk of the temple, the first step in the renunciation of worldly ambitions.

2. John dresses in the sarong of a prince.

3. This is the last day that John will be allowed to wear the necklace with the Buddha image. After he is ordained he will have to remove the necklace and wear only the monks robes that are offered to him by the laity. The monk is prohibited from adorning his body with perfume or jewelry.

4. A member of the laity secures the kroma worn by the ordinand. The right shoulder is kept bare.

5. John, his family, and friends enjoy a special meal of rice soup called bau bau. This will be John's last meal as a member of the lay community. After today he is not allowed to eat after the noon hour. The monks who reside in the temple will remain downstairs in their living quarters until the meal is finished. Traditionally, meals would be eaten in another room or building out of view of the Buddha statue; this however is one of many digressions from strict observance of the Buddhist doctrine that the Cambodian Community of Lowell has had to make in re-establishing Buddhism in the Greater Lowell area.

6. After the meal the laity are led by the achar (senior members of the laity who officiate and guide the lay community during ceremonies) in chanting.

7. The laity chant to the Three Refuges: the Buddha, the Dhamma (the teachings of the Buddha), and the Sangha (the community of monks); and the five precepts: to abstain from killing, lying, taking what is not offered, liquor, and sexual misconduct.

8. The Buddha statue. This statue has not yet been consecrated and is therefore not considered a religious symbol of the Buddha. In a later section we will discuss the consecration ceremony.

9. John's mother (right). Before the ordination ceremony is performed it is necessary for the candidate to receive his parent's permission to enter the monastic order. The candidate must also be free of debt. These requirements are made so that the monk will not be distracted from religious practice and study.

10. John's bows three times to his mother in farewell.

11. John is assisted by the achar (background). John will bow to the rest of the laity after he has finished bowing to his mother.

12. The monks have returned from downstairs to conduct the chanting that will bless the ordinand and the laity. The monks are led in the chanting by the abbot, Venerable Sao Khon (background). Venerable Sao Khon was consulted to determine an auspicious day to perform the ordination ceremony. It is believed that this day must be in harmony with the ordinand's personal orientation to the stars and planets.

13. Venerable Sao Khon lights a candle and begins to melt the wax into the bowl of holy water placed before him. The monks were served orange juice by members of the laity.

14. Venerable Sao Khon sprays the candidate then the laity with holy water. This is a means of sharing the merit earned by the ordination. Earning merit in order to gain power over the agents of causation, which determine worldly prosperity and the plane of existence of future lives, is at the heart of popular Buddhist belief.

This marks the end of the first day of the ordination ceremony.

15. The second day of the ordination begins after the usual daily prayer and noon meal. John dresses into the outfit he wore the previous day and the lay women offer the individual members of the laity flowers and candles and three sticks of incense in preparation for the procession that is the next step in the ordination ceremony.

The laity begins to assemble outside the temple and John's robes are placed in a silver tray which will be balanced on the head of a lay woman who will lead the procession at John's side. The Konrope Tie described earlier is placed over the robes. Participation in the ordination is considered to be a valuable means of earning merit especially to those who are directly involved, such as the woman carrying the tray.

16. The laity assemble.

17. The procession is ready to begin. At the head of the procession are John's closest friends who, according to the Renunciation of Prince Siddhatha Gotama, are to try to dissuade him from his objective with their worldly lives. This is not taken seriously and any attempts are made in fun. To John's left is another American Buddhist who is holding the begging bowl that he will offer John once he is ordained. Traditionally, the monks beg for their daily food during morning rounds through the village.

18. The procession parades around the temple three times in recognition of the Three refuges. They keep their right shoulder to the temple.

19. The women wear their best sarongs and lace kromas.

20. Smile!

. 21. The procession returns inside the temple and John is asked to sit before the monks who are arranged in a circle and are prepared to receive him.

John bows three times to the woman who carried his robes which are set beside him.

22. John stands before the monk who will act as his spiritual guide. While holding his robes he reads from Pali chants (Pali is the religious language of Theravada Buddhism).

23. He then kneels before his spiritual guide while continuing to recite the Pali chants.

24. John offers the spiritual guide his robes.

25. The spiritual guide returns the kroma of the monk and John removes the kroma of the Prince.

26. John is offered the sarong of the monk with instructions to repair to the corner and change.

27. Members of the laity help John change into the sarong of the monk.

28. John returns, reads last stanzas of Pali chants, then bows three times to his spiritual guide. John is now ordained as a novice monk.

29. The monks chant encouraging John to faithfully keep the ten precepts of the Novice which require that he refrain from killing, lying, taking what is not offered, liquor, sexual misconduct, adorning his body with perfume, sleeping in a luxurious bed, eating at forbidden times, dancing or music shows, and receiving money. Venerable Sao Khon then sprays holy water on the laity to convey merit to all present.

30. Venerable John Massey takes his place among the Order.

CONSECRATION OF THE BUDDHA STATUE

CONSECRATION OF THE BUDDHA STATUE

The ceremony for the consecration of the Buddha statue was conducted at the Trairatanaram Temple on July 10, 11, 12, 1987. The ceremony coincided with the celebration of the Vossa, or Rain Retreat, which is the three month period during which the monks are required to remain at the temple in order to concentrate on religious study and the practice of meditation. The three month rain retreat is held every year and in Cambodia it would coincide with the rainy season when both the monks and the laity reaffirm their dedication to the Buddhist doctrine.

The consecration of the Buddha statue is a rare celebration and many members of the laity that I spoke to said they had never seen it performed before. This is probably due to the fact that the task of making the statue is very difficult and requires a great deal of skill and experience.

CONSECRATION OF THE BUDDHA STATUE

The statue that was made especially for the Trairatanaram Temple was sculpted by a young monk, Poolsin Pat, who resided at the temple. To make the statue he constructed a wire mesh which he covered with layers of concrete and smoothed using chisels and sandpaper. It was later covered with layers of gold spray paint after the abbot of the temple wrote Pali words on the various parts of the statue.

The statue is not considered to be a recognized representation of the Buddha until after the ceremony when the laity will bow to it in homage to the Buddha. The ceremony is sometimes called "The Festival of the Opening of the Eyes of the Buddha" since the last step of the ceremony is to touch the eyes of the statue before dawn to symbolically endow the statue with the enlightenment of the Buddha.

CONSECRATION OF THE BUDDHA STATUE

1. Dressed in white, the laity assemble before the altar, referred to as the "Castle of Angels", to pray and invoke the spirit's blessing for the ceremony. The achar stands before the congregation to lead them in prayer.

The altar which was made especially for the ceremony has three tiers. Arranged on the first tier are a pair of Bai Si (described later), a vase of eleven lit candles, unopened packages of incense sticks, unlit candles, and two lit candles placed in candle sticks. The second tier has a pair of Bai Si, two trays of fruit, an American and Cambodian flag, a vase of flowers, and a bottle of coke. The third tier has a pair of Bai Si, two vases of silk flowers, and the six-tiered umbrella tree, called the Chhat Ruit, representing the five lives of the Buddha and his future life.

2. The Bai Si. This ornament, made of a cylinder divided into three tiers and topped with a cone in which a candle and three sticks of incense are placed, is a symbolic representation of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. There are other versions with more tiers that symbolically break up the Three Refuges into their components.

3. Multi-tiered Bai Si.

4. Before prayer, incense sticks are passed out to all members of the laity. The offering of candles and incense to the sacred altar is usually the first step in any religious activity.

5. A lay woman holds a flame for the "nuns" to light their incense sticks. These "nuns" who have shaved their heads will observe eight precepts for an indefinite amount of time. In Theravada Buddhism there is no prescribed amount of time that a male must be a monk or a woman be a nun. Some monks remain in the Order for as little as a week as a means of paying tribute to his parents and then returns to lay life with no stigma attached. This practice differs from the other vehicle of Buddhism, Mahayana, in which a male once ordained is committed for life.

6. Nuns light their incense sticks at the altar.

The nuns will live at the temple and prepare the meals for the monks. From my observations, the nuns did not spend their time at the temple to practice meditation or study the Buddhist doctrine, instead they cleaned and decorated the temple and enjoyed each other's company through conversation and the administering of traditional health care, i.e. coining, cupping, massage, etc.

7. A nun lights her incense stick as the achar looks on.

Here we can see the second and third tiers of the altar. On the second tier there are two bottles of coke, obviously these would not be traditionally used in Cambodia, they may however substitute for the bowls of juice or sap from the sambour tree, a type of thorny cassia tree with yellow blossoms that exudes fragrant juice, that would traditionally be used but is not available in Lowell.

8. The men follow the woman adding their lit incense sticks to the others collected here in an old paint can.

9. After the offering of incense is made the laity retake their places before the altar and join in reciting the Pali chants led by the achar (foreground).

10. The traditional musicians take part in this ceremony. Inside the temple I have only heard taped music played during celebrations, nonetheless, music is an important part of the religious ceremonies, especially weddings where the music is used to introduce or "call the bride" to the ceremony and generally accompany the proceedings.

The instruments shown here are the troe (violin), kloy (flute), and takae (similar to a mountain dulcimer, background).

11. Inside the temple, the altar is especially prepared for the Consecration of the Buddha Statue Ceremony.

The statue is seated on the first tier of the altar and is surrounded by other smaller statues that are added to the altar "to lend power".

The statue with one leg across the other, the sole of the right foot turned upward, the left hand upward with palm turned upward, and the right hand resting on the right leg with fingers hanging downward, represent the Buddha teaching in a seated position. The toes and fingers, except for the thumb and big toe, are of equal length; the ears are prolonged so they almost reach the shoulders and are marked with the slits made by the heavy golden earrings worn by Siddhatha before he fled his father's palace to become a monk. The head is covered with curled hair, some artists will carve the hair so each curl is turned to the right in accordance with the Pali canon.

The face shows great kindness and gentleness, and serenity of spirit.

12. Candles, incense, and figurines placed before the altar. You will also notice five pink lotus blossoms placed before the principal statue. These five closed blossoms arranged in a single line are meant to symbolize a perpetual homage to the Buddha, an offering of lotus blossoms that do not wither. They represent the five lives of the Buddha mentioned in reference to the six-tiered umbrella.

13. The Buddha statue.

14. The multi-tiered Bai Si and the tall candle offered for the three month rain retreat. For the duration of the three month retreat the monks are to keep this candle lit. In some monasteries a monk is appointed to stand watch over the candle with instructions to relight the candle if it should go out. This practice however, was not observed.

15. The laity has returned inside. The achar kneel before the altar to pray. The statue will not be observed as an image of the Buddha or prayed to until after the ceremony.

16. Two lay women preparing to chew the dried betel-nut kept in the silver tins. The betel-nut is placed in a leaf of tobacco, spread with a pink lime paste that activates the ingredients of the betel-nut, then folded into a square and placed between the cheek and gum. This "pastime" is very popular among the woman who generally do not smoke.

17. The achar leads lay women in presenting offerings to the monks. The offerings made at the beginning of the rain retreat, which provide the monks with the necessities that they will use during that time, earn considerable merit.

18. The offerings are presented in silver trays. Anything that is offered or passed to the monks must be held with two hands.

19. A nun and lay woman folding a yellow cloth into a lotus flower.

20. Other offerings are presented in this specially folded cloth. The lotus flower is a sacred religious flower. The flower, which is rooted in the mud and grows through the murky water until it rises above the surface and blooms, is said to symbolize the renunciation of worldly ambition and the path to enlightenment.

21. A nun posing with her offering.

22. A nun preparing her offering of incense, candles and
tins of tea.

23. Along with the large statue of the Buddha teaching, Poolsin Pat also sculpted four other smaller statues.

The string that is wrapped around the statues began at the altar outside, was suspended between a tree and the eaves of the temple roof, and brought inside through the window behind the altar where it was wrapped around the statues. The area inside the string and anyone touching it is protected from bad spirits by the power of the Buddha.

24. The other two statues sculpted by Poolsin Pat. The standing image is holding the begging bowl used by the monks on their morning alms rounds through the village when they are offered spoonfuls of rice from the members of the laity.

25. The candle offered for the Rain Retreat or Vossa.

26. The bowl used by the abbot of the temple Venerable Sao Khon. The bowl is filled with water which becomes blessed as the Venerable chants while melting wax into the water. The water is then sprayed over the heads of the laity assembled before him with a brush or, in some cases, a leafy twig, to convey merit on everyone present.

27. Venerable Sao Khon places a burning stick of incense before the altar. He has also lit the candle that will drip into the bowl of holy water. More often I have seen the Venerable hold the candle over the water with his hand while he is chanting.

28. A monk from Lynn who has come to the temple to take part in the ceremony touches the tops of the candles offered for the retreat. Perhaps he is symbolically lighting the candles. During the duration of the three months the monks will use a an electric light instead of the candle.

29. The achar lights the candles placed before the altar.

30. The achar is a high ranking member of the laity who has usually been a monk for many years and is respected for his religious devotion and wisdom.

31. The monks arrive and assemble on the long platform constructed before the altar. The monks arrange themselves according to seniority with those who have been in the Order for the greater number of rainy seasons sitting closer to the altar. For this ceremony seven monks have come from other temples; the more monks that are present the greater the significance of the ceremony.

32. The Venerable monk from Lynn who is the most senior of the monks presents will preside over the ceremony and is seated in a higher chair than the rest.

The laity must not sit higher than the monks who must not sit higher than the Buddha statue. For that reason it is customary for members of the laity to stoop when walking in the presence of the monks. This is also true when a younger laymen walks among the senior members of the congregation.

33. The monks follow Venerable Sao Khon and the presiding monk in chanting. The chants are recited in the Pali language.

34. After a round of chants the monks rest and have a drink and a smoke.

35. The monks are served orange juice as the achar makes an announcement over the loudspeaker (background).

36. The monks continue to chant. The cotton string is unravelled from the statue and passed to include each monk who holds it up between his hands while chanting. It is past midnight and most of the laity have gone home; those remaining include the nuns and achar and those members of the laity who will stay the night.

In the small bowls between the monks are empty bottles of Vitamin D drink. The more recently ordained monks are reading from a text of Pali in a effort to memorize the chants.

37. Venerable Sao Khon keeps track of the number of times a chant is repeated using the string of beads. The rosary is called the Phkom and has one hundred and eight beads. Each chant during the night was repeated one hundred and eight times. The chanting, so I was told, serves to "purify the temple" and the minds of the monks; they build up concentration until the last moment when, before the break of dawn the pace of the chanting accelerates before it ends, and the statue is consecrated.

Before the chanting ends the presiding monk kneels before the altar with a leaf in each hand, dips the leaves in the holy water, then snuffs the flames of the candles.

After the chanting is finished the "purest" monk touches the eyes of the statue or draws the eyes with a pen.

38. During the course of the evening a tray of special rice called motu poya is carried out and placed on the floor beside the platform on which the monks sat chanting. The grains of rice were spread out on a yellow cloth by one of the nuns who instructed the young girls present to remove the broken grains from the pile. Meanwhile, a yellow umbrella is held over them by a layman.

39. The broken grains are removed.

40. It was obvious that this was an unpopular task and the girls who took part did not share the enthusiasm of the man who selected them. I was unable to find out what purpose this tedious ritual served. Perhaps the rice was used in preparing the special dessert being made in the kitchen.

41. Nevertheless the girls cooperated.

42. Tired laymen.

43. After the ceremony the presiding monk was asked to measure the power of the Buddha images placed before the altar by members of the laity.

The presiding monk held them in his outstretched hand which "grew" according to the power of the particular image.

44. Making dessert.

45. The prepared dessert is strained through the pan which is held by the red handles he is fastening with string.

RAIN RETREAT CEREMONY (VOSSA)

MONEY TREE FUND RAISING